

**Guest Author Sam Vaknin, PhD:**  
**“It’s All My Fault; I Provoked Him.”**

Wednesday, September 28, 2011



"Rovinj at Dawn" by Mimi Stuart  
Live the Life you Desire

How often have you heard the following phrases coupled with the most horrific physical, verbal, and psychological abuse: “It’s all your fault, you made me do it” or “look what you made me do!”

Abusers have alloplastic defenses and an external locus of control. This means that they tend to blame others for their misfortunes, mistakes, and misconduct. They believe that the world is a hostile place, “out to get them”, and that there is little they can do to mitigate and ameliorate their failures and defeats. Their acts and choices are brought on by other people’s malevolence, negligence, and stupidity. Abusers regard themselves as eternal victims.

The problem starts when the true victims – often the abuser’s “nearest and dearest” – adopt his/her point of view and begin to feel guilty and responsible for his/her reprehensible behaviors. This folie à deux (literally, in French, “madness in twosome”) or shared psychosis is very common: victims and abusers form symbiotic dyads, abrogate reality, and share the same delusions. They allocate roles: the victim triggers the abuse and deserves it, the abuser is merely a hapless tool, devoid of volition and with an absent impulse-control.

But why would anyone succumb to such a patently fallacious view of the world? Why would anyone assume the guilt for her own torture and maltreatment? Shared psychosis is a complex phenomenon with numerous psychodynamic roots. Some victims fear abandonment and would do anything to placate their abusive intimate partner.

Others grew up in dysfunctional families and are familiar and comfortable with abuse (it is their “comfort zone.”) Some victims are masochistic and others simply want to “make the relationship work.” Fear plays a big part, too: sometimes the only way not to provoke another onslaught is by playing by the abuser’s rules.

So, what can you do about it?

1. Start by realizing a few crucial facts, supported by reams of research and mountain-ranges of court decisions: Abuse is never justified. No amount of discord and provocation warrant violence of any kind (verbal, sexual, physical); The abuser chooses to misbehave. S/he is not compelled to batter you, or berate you, or rape you, or humiliate you; There is nothing you could have done differently to forestall the abuse. You are not guilty, you are not to blame, you are the victim, not the perpetrator. These should be your mantras.

Your abuser doesn’t love you. Abuse and love are antonyms. Abuse is never a form of expressing love.

2. Next, try to figure out why you have acquiesced to your abuser’s behavior. Are you anxious that s/he may abandon you if you stand up for yourself? Are you scared that the abuse may escalate if you resist him/her? Do you feel helpless? Have you always felt this way or is this learned helplessness? Are you truly alone – or do you have supportive friends and family? What about the authorities? Do you trust them to protect you and, if not, why not?

3. Analyze the relationship. Can you reframe your roles? Are you sufficiently strong to put a stop to the abuse by posing conditions, imposing sanctions, and acting on infringements? Is couples therapy an option? If you have answered “no” to any of these three questions, you are better off without your abuser. Start looking for a way out. Plan the getaway in detail and share your intentions with friends, family, and trusted co-workers. Then act on it.

Remember: The world never comes to an end when relationships do — but abuse can be deadly.

by Sam Vaknin, PhD, [the excellent author of “Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited” and other books about personality disorders.](#)

[Watch Sam Vaknin's video: "Idealized, Devalued, Dumped."](#)

**Guest Author Sam Vaknin, PhD**  
**"I Can't Live Without Him/Her."**

Monday, August 29, 2011



"Intoxication" — Ben Hogan by Mimi Stuart  
Live the Life you Desire

Dependence on other people is a kind of addiction and, therefore, fulfills important mental health functions.

First, it is an organizing principle: it serves to explain behaviors and events within a coherent "narrative" (fictional story) or frame of reference ("I acted this way because ...").

Second, it gives meaning to life.

Third, the constant ups and downs satisfy your need for excitement and thrills.

Fourth, and most crucially, your addiction and emotional lability place you at the center of attention and allow you to manipulate people around you to do your bidding.

So, while you can surely survive without your intimate partner, you believe (erroneously) that you cannot go on living without your addiction to him or her. You experience your dependence as a warm and familiar comfort zone. You are addicted to and dependent on your dependence, but you attribute its source to boyfriends, mates, spouses, children, parents – anyone who happens to fit the bill and the plot of your narrative. They come and go – your addiction remains intact; they are interchangeable – your dependence is immutable.

So, what can you do about it?

Extreme cases of codependence (known as Dependent or Borderline Personality Disorders) require professional help. Luckily, most people with dependent traits and behaviors are clustered somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of dependence.

1. Help yourself by realizing that the world never comes to an end when relationships do: it is your dependence which reacts with desperation, not you.

2. Next, analyze your addiction: what are the stories and narratives that underlie it? Do you tend to idealize your intimate partner? If so, can you see him or her in a more realistic light? Are you anxious about being abandoned? Why? Have you been traumatically abandoned in the past, as a child, perhaps?

3. Write down the worst possible scenario: the relationship is over and s/he leaves you. Is your physical survival at stake? Of course not.

4. Make a list of the consequences of the breakup and write next to each one what you can and intend to do about it. Armed with this plan of action, you are bound to feel safer and more confident.

5. Finally, make sure to share your thoughts, fears, and emotions with friends and family. Social support is indispensable. One good friend is worth a hundred therapy sessions.

by Sam Vaknin, PhD, [the author of "Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited" and other books about personality disorders.](#)

[Read "I want more intimacy and to feel closer to you."](#)